

14 Steps to Affair Healing



*An Affair Recovery Guide for
Betrayed & Unfaithful Partners*

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About this Guide

This QuickGuide offers an overview of the steps toward affair recovery as presented by Tim Tedder in his Affair Healing Manuals for betrayed and unfaithful spouses. (See AffairHealinBook.com for more information.)

This guide is presented in two parts:

<i>14 Steps for the Betrayed Spouse</i>	pages 1-5
<i>14 Steps for the Unfaithful Spouse</i>	pages 6-11

About the Author

Tim Tedder is a licensed counselor who focuses on helping individuals and couples heal from the wounds of infidelity. He and his wife, Sharon, are co-owners of Currents Counseling Services in Winter Park, Florida.

In 2009, Tim created AffairHealing.com which has become a site for resources and community to thousands of people around the world. His stated mission is “to creatively communicate a message of hope and healing to wounded people.”

14 Steps for the Betrayed Spouse

These 14 Steps provide an overview of the eBook: *Affair Healing: A Manual for Betrayed Spouses*, written by Tim Tedder. The manual provides 14 chapters and 18 printable worksheets. For more information, visit AffairHealingBook.com.

STEP 1 Consider your options, then schedule your decision.



Regarding your marriage, you have 3 options: (1) leave now, (2) give it some time, or (3) stay no matter what. Most betrayed spouses I talk to never expected this to happen to them or, if it ever did, never believed they would consider staying. They are surprised by their own indecision.

To even consider remaining with a cheating spouse may seem like weakness, but it's not. Whether you stay or go, your decision can be motivated by a confident strength, not fear. In the middle of the emotional upheaval you're experiencing right now, however, it's difficult to have a clear, healthy perspective.

Put off permanent choices for a while. Attend to the more immediate choices (setting boundaries, getting help) and wait before you make long-lasting ones.

"I knew I wanted to be able to walk away from this experience and be okay with my actions, make a legitimate effort toward reconciliation, know I did everything I could, and improve other relationships in my life."

-Betrayed Spouse

STEP 2 Make careful choices regarding the affair partner.



You are going to have to make some decisions regarding your spouse's affair partner. (And, yes, you should insist on knowing who it was/is.) There are some exceptions to each of the following principles, but they are rare. Here is my general advice:

Should you contact the affair partner (AP)? Never for retribution. Sometimes for information, if you suspect your spouse is lying or that the AP may not know about your marriage. Usually not after your spouse has confessed and disconnected. If in doubt, don't.

Should your spouse contact the AP? If there has been no closure to the affair, you may want to give opportunity for this to happen, but in a way that allows you to feel safe. Move to quick closure and then NO CONTACT from that point on.

Should you tell the AP's spouse/partner? Maybe, but think about it for a while. This act will change someone else's life, so don't make it out of your need for justice. Ask yourself: If I was in their situation, would I want someone to tell me?

STEP 3 Release your grip on your spouse.

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When we think we're losing something valuable, our instinct is to grab hold of it and maintain a tight grip. While that may work to keep objects from slipping away, it usually produces an opposite effect in relationships.

People resist control. We recognize this in dating (the person who "needs" a relationship can seldom keep one) but fail to acknowledge it when the stakes are higher. The principle doesn't change, however, just because a vow was once uttered.

If your unfaithful spouse is not expressing sincere commitment to you and your marriage, if they are still in contact with the affair partner, if they are confused by what they want, if they say they love you but are not "in love" with you anymore... you need to release them. I know this is a scary choice, but if you attempt to keep your spouse by trapping them back into your marriage, you are likely prolonging a season of misery.

STEP 4 Establish your boundaries.

4

I am going to give you some strong advice. You can take it or leave it, but I wish I could show you the almost-certain disappointing results when it is ignored.

Sexual Boundaries: For some betrayed spouses, the discovery of an affair shuts down any interest in sexual intimacy. For others, the desire for sexual connection becomes nearly irresistible. Unless you are certain that your spouse is no longer sexually involved with the affair partner, you need to create physical distance. *Don't share your spouse with anyone else.*

Relationship Boundaries: You will likely spend some time trying to work through relationship issues with your spouse, but you should eventually stop ALL relationship conversations or connections if he/she fails to express two things: (1) I am single-minded in my choice for you and our marriage; no confusion remains. (2) I will do the work necessary to repair and strengthen our relationship. If your spouse cannot commit to both, then keep your interactions limited to business-of-life issues (care of children, paying bills, home care, etc.).

"When I set boundaries I got positive responses, but I gave in too quickly. Now I clearly see that not sticking to them only hurt me..."

-Betrayed Spouse

STEP 5 Help your spouse understand your pain.

5

Your spouse may be so focussed on their own issues that they give little attention to your pain. They will likely struggle with exposure to your hurt because it triggers feelings of shame. They may withdraw or get angry rather than be that vulnerable.

But your spouse needs to have some insight into your pain. It's important for your healing, but it's important for theirs as well. At first, you may have little control over the way pain flows out of you (as rage or as brokenness). Eventually, you can be more intentional in inviting him/her to look at your wound. Look for opportunities to write, say, and do those things that will help your partner view your hurt in a different way.

STEP Decide who else to tell & what to tell.

6

The questions of who to talk to about the affair and how much to reveal about it can be complicated to answer. The manual provides more detail input regarding the various issues to consider, but let me simply point out that as you consider your conversations with various people (trusted confidants, family, friends, children, spouse's coworkers, or the affair partner's spouse), realize that the current phase of the affair should have some bearing on what you decide. Consider the following affair phases:

- Discovery: first 2 weeks of knowing about the affair.
- Active: the spouse remains involved in the affair relationship.
- Transition: period of change from having contact with the affair partner to ending the affair
- Termination: the affair ends

Generally, show more caution in talking about the affair if it is in the Discovery or Termination phase. But if an affair remains active (or the transition is long), you may need to consider more options. There are many issues to consider, but you should not be left to carry a burden of secrecy.

STEP Recognize truth-shifting.

7

Most betrayed spouses, at the moment of affair discovery, experience a desperate longing for the truth. Sound familiar? In an instant, well-established perspectives of your partner and marriage were called into question. You have been left to wonder what you can believe.

You need to make sense of all this, but the manner in which you seek understanding is important. Your pursuit of the facts should be done in a way that leads toward clarity rather than confusion, conflict, or obsession.

“The man I thought I knew for the past twenty--one years was nowhere to be found. Someone stole him away and replaced him with a liar and cheater.”
-Betrayed Spouse

STEP Get the truth carefully but certainly.

8

If I could rush into every affair discovery and immediately control one part of it, it would likely be this: make sure necessary questions are asked and answered, while unnecessary questions are ignored. The problem is *every question you have seems important and necessary right now*. But believe me, some answers will end up hurting you more than they help.

Here's what you should know immediately: Who was it? How far did it go? Is it completely over? Has this affair produced anything I will have to deal with in the future (pregnancy, financial obligations, business arrangements, etc.)? What do you want now? Have you been tested for STDs? All those other details (the ones that focus on specific places, times, events, sexual details) should wait and, ideally, be addressed when you have the help of a qualified counselor.

The answers to these detailed questions will give you knowledge you can never unlearn, and none of them are necessary for recovery.

STEP Determine who you will become, married or not.



Focus on your personal growth. If all your attention and effort is directed toward saving your marriage, then your level of satisfaction is going to be determined by circumstances that you do not ultimately control. It is important for you to know what you want for your marriage, but it is even more important for you to know what kind of person you want to be, whether or not your spouse joins you in a common goal.

Take time to consider who you are becoming, or who you *want* to become. Choices made out of this motivation, rather than from obligation, shame, or a desire for certain circumstantial outcomes, are more likely to move you toward change that can last for a lifetime. Make use of resources (books, counseling, groups, courses) that help you focus on this. Your strongest decisions regarding your marriage will come out of a clear vision of what a whole and healthy you looks like.



STEP Forgive first, trust second (maybe).

For your own sake, I hope you'll eventually forgive your spouse, whether they deserve it or not. Letting go of the past will be better for you, as well as healing for them. Forgiveness is a choice you will make, but it may take some time to get there. Don't jump into it before you're ready to release your grip on the unjust thing that was done to you.

Trust is a different matter. Even if your spouse was 100% committed to truthfulness, it will take time for you to feel settled in your trust. Rebuilding trust requires two things: (1) enough time (2) filled with the right stuff. You need both, so don't be manipulated by a spouse who expects you to "just get over it" or assumes no responsibility for earning it back.

"I've been frozen, unable to move forward because the pieces of my shattered heart are scattered like mines all around me, keeping me from taking a step... I'm not being pressured to make any decisions or forgive anything now, but I have to start looking forward, not backwards. What is behind me will never change."

-Betrayed Spouse



STEP Regain control of thoughts and feelings.

Most betrayed partners will experience PTSD-like symptoms during the days or weeks immediately following the trauma of affair discovery: recurring thoughts that cause distress, sleep problems, irritability, feeling threatened, or impairment in personal or social functioning. These are normal responses to a traumatic event and should diminish in intensity and frequency as time passes. For some people, however, these conditions linger, resulting in a sense of being stuck.

There are a number of strategies that can help, but let me suggest one to start with. Even though it feels like you are stuck, understand that you are not trapped in these moments. They are real, but they are temporary. They are clouds, not cages. You can move through them. Eventually, they will thin out and go away for good.

The next time you begin to experience the familiar anxiety, don't try to suppress it. Meet it head-on but say (out loud, if you want!), "You are not a cage; you are a cloud I will walk through." For a moment, give attention to whatever is necessary (pain, grief, fear). Write down your thoughts and feelings if you want, but then visualize yourself moving out of the cloud and refocus your thoughts on what is ahead.

STEP 12

Find the support you need.

If there is ever a time when a couple needs a good counselor, it is after an affair. If you and your spouse are committed to rebuilding the marriage, I encourage you to start couple's counseling as soon as possible. Individual counseling should be an addition to your joint work.

Make sure you find a counselor who is experienced in the work of affair recovery. There are many good marriage counselors who are honestly uncomfortable focussing on the trauma work required for infidelity issues. These counselors will minimize the trauma and push you toward marriage building too soon. Don't waste time or money with someone who does not fully understand this problem.

What if your spouse refuses to go to counseling? Give them the responsibility for coming up with a plan for healing your relationship. Participate in their plan wholeheartedly, but be honest if it isn't doing enough for you or your marriage.

STEP 13

Move in a new direction.

Many valuable books and courses have been written to help couples learn the necessary skills of marriage building, but I believe there is a single principle that underlies them all. *In any encounter, healthy relationship is experienced when each partner moves **toward the other with love and truth.***

When you feel disappointed, hurt, and defensive, you probably to move in other directions. If you're like most people, you either move away (physically leave or emotionally shut down) or against (anger, criticism, demands, abuse, etc.). Relationships begin to change when each partner turns their focus away from the faults of their partner and give attention instead to the ways they fail to move toward each other. Change starts with you.

In any encounter, a healthy relationship is experienced when each partner moves toward the other with love and truth.

STEP 14

Commit to conversations that connect.

Communication is a primary means by which partners "move toward" one another in a marriage or relationship. I suggest three actions to help assure a satisfying conclusion to conversations.

- **Action 1:** Seek connection more than being right. Before you engage in a conversation, be honest about your end goal. Is it primarily to convince your spouse? To get your way? Or is it more important for you to be connected even if you cannot come to a mutual agreement right now?
- **Action 2:** Start the conversation in a way that is inviting rather than confrontational. If your first words or actions are ones that evoke defensiveness, you're probably better off backing off and trying again later.
- **Action 3:** Focus on being curious about your partner's point of view (even if you disagree) rather than convincing them that you are right.

You'll fail at this. You'll disappoint each other. Every couple does. But when that happens you can go back, admit your part, make the corrections, and affirm that healthy connection is more valuable than getting your way.

Are you in need of personal help? We offer private phone coaching for individuals and couples.
For more information, visit AffairHealing.com/coaching.

14 Steps for the Unfaithful Spouse

These 14 Steps give an overview of the eBook: *Affair Healing: A Manual for Unfaithful Spouses*, written by Tim Tedder, LMHC, NCC. The manual provides guidance for each recovery step, supplemented with printable worksheets. It is scheduled to be released in 2017. For more information, visit AffairHealingBook.com.

STEP 1 Make a quick, clear choice.



Getting involved in an affair eventually requires a choice: you either choose your spouse, choose your affair partner, or leave both of them. Each choice has benefits and consequences, and each will lead you to a distinct future.

There is another option: remaining undecided, refusing to move certainly in any direction. The indecisive person repeatedly alternates between spouse and affair partner, afraid to commit to either, shifting when enough fear or longing pushes them in the other direction. Many capable men and women become weak in this uncertainty.

The consequences of prolonged indecision are many. Very few relationships (the marriage or the affair) survive and the pain inflicted on everyone is immense. Don't let that happen. If you need time to be more certain, separate from the affair long enough to seek counsel from people you trust and consider your future thoughtfully. Then make your choice.

STEP 2 Take a one-way exit from your affair.



If you want your marriage to recover, if you want your spouse to learn to trust you again, if you have any hope for a satisfying relationship with your spouse in the future, end your affair now. Don't leave a backdoor open. If you say to your affair partner, "Let me go try my marriage for a while, but I'll be back if it doesn't work," you'll probably return because you never really left.

Sever all contact. Close all email accounts and change your phone number. Switch jobs or move to a different location. Your marriage is at stake and ongoing contact with the affair partner is always an issue. *Always*.

STEP 3 Accept full responsibility for every choice you make.



You may be able to provide many reasons for why you had an affair, but infidelity was not your only choice. Now is not the time for excuses (or for explanations that sound like excuses). You need to take full responsibility for your affair. For a while, focus on your failure to keep the promises you once made and on the pain your actions have caused others.

Eventually, you will need to be honest about all the vulnerabilities in your life or in your marriage, but hold off on these discussions until your spouse has regained emotional stability. That may take a while.

STEP Turn your marriage into a safe place.

4

Don't leave it up to your spouse to fight for their security. If you do, he/she will remain anxious and you will resent their attempts to "control" you. They are insecure because you broke their trust; they will only begin to feel secure again when you take responsibility for making them feel safe.

Here's what you need to say to your spouse, constantly and consistently, until they are no longer in need of this level of attention: *"I know that what I've done has made you afraid of what I might do again. I want you to learn that you can trust me again. I've tried to think of everything that might make you feel anxious and here's what I've come up with... Here's what I will do to help you feel safe... Is there anything else I haven't thought of?"*

The kinds of things you need to do:

- Unlock your accounts or provide passwords to assure that nothing is being hidden.
- Get rid of *everything* that is a product of the affair (gifts, reminders, pictures, emails, clothes, etc.).
- Keep your phone unlocked and in the open, offering it to your spouse if they ever seem uncertain.
- Willingly set boundaries in any relationship that feels unsafe to your spouse.
- Ask frequently if there is anything else you can do.

"I've tried to explain to him, 'What if the table was turned, and you found out all this about me? What if you read those texts and had those lies told to you? How would that make you feel?' Would he take me back if I did that to him? If I lied to him over and over? Is he able to understand, or even try to understand, how much pain I'm in when I cry every time he tries to hold me?"

-a Betrayed Spouse

STEP Confide in a friend of your marriage.

5

You need support. You need to open up to someone with whom you can be very honest. This is not the kind of problem you should expect to handle on your own. Swallow your pride and talk to someone.

If you have hope for your marriage, make sure your confidant is a friend of your marriage. Avoid counsel from anyone who encourages (or practices) unfaithfulness. Avoid connecting with anyone for whom you could develop romantic feelings. Avoid counselors who focus on self-empowerment ("you deserve to be happy; you have the right to do whatever you want") without recognizing the sacrifice required for trusting, intimate relationships.

STEP Consider what to tell your children & family.

6

If your affair is unknown to others, I understand the tendency to keep it a private matter between you and your spouse. The decision of whether or not to tell anyone else is a personal one. There is no single answer that fits every person or situation, but let me encourage you to consider the benefits of disclosing your affair to your family, including your children.

Telling Your Family (including your spouse's family): There is great benefit to you when you choose to be honest and authentic with your family. None of us like to admit failure or to negatively impact others' opinion of us, but one thing to learn from your affair is that you are a healthier person when you value truth above impressions. There are likely family lessons that will only be learned through the risk of honesty.

- *When you absolutely should talk to your family:* When they already know about or suspect the affair. Clear the air. If necessary, ask for their forgiveness. Don't let the elephant take its permanent place as the unmentioned thing in the corner of the family room.
- *When you should not talk to your family:* If your family is highly dysfunctional, or if they have failed to love you well in the past, or if you cannot trust them, or if they are more likely to offer you shame than grace, then don't tell them if they don't already know.

Telling Your Children: Don't assume that you should not discuss your affair with your children. Sometimes, it is the best thing you can do. Here are a couple considerations:

- Don't lie to ANY child if they ask direct questions. You should talk to them with an appropriate level of information (based on age and knowledge). Teach them about failure and forgiveness.
- If children know or suspect, you should initiate conversation with them as soon as possible. Talk to them truthfully. Ask them if they have any questions. Repeat this conversation several times over the following months. (By the way, if your child is 12 or older and they have been witness to the conflict between you and your spouse, you can assume they wonder about an affair even if nothing has been said.)

STEP Step into your spouse's pain.

7

This will be one of the hardest things you ever do. The pain of betrayal is one of the deepest hurts anyone can experience. You will desperately desire to hide from that pain, especially because you know you are responsible for it.

Your spouse cannot just "move on" from this. The wound needs to heal. If you are going to remain in relationship with him/her, you need to be the one who offers comfort and relief.

Start by taking responsibility, every day, to ask how they are doing. These are not fun conversations, but they can be healing ones. They provide regular relief to the pain. They result in fewer emotional explosions and a quicker return to emotional stability.

"I knew the truth would hurt her more, and so I didn't want to admit to some things. I was so used to lying, it felt like I didn't even know how to tell the truth..."

"Being committed to honesty became empowering. It was easier to just admit the truth than to keep trying to control all the information. I eventually told her, "Okay, I'll make you this promise: I won't lie to you, but you won't always like what you hear."
-an Unfaithful Spouse

STEP Speak only the truth.

8

Your secrets and lies have obviously taken a toll on your marriage, but you have been paying a personal price as well. Your dishonesty has become a trap. Most unfaithful spouses only realize this after they commit to honesty and experience the freedom that comes from simply speaking the truth.

There may be things you're not ready to tell your spouse yet, maybe things you're not sure you will ever tell them. If so, it is better to say nothing than to tell more lies, even if you convince yourself that you lie to protect your spouse.

There are some parts of the truth that are best left unsaid. Certain details (sexual details, comparisons to the affair partner, specific dates, places or events, etc.) of your affair can cause permanent damage to your spouse. These kinds of questions are best left unasked and unanswered *but you cannot insist on controlling the information*. If you do, your spouse will believe you are still protecting the affair.

I would suggest that you say something like this: “I am willing to be completely honest with you. I am concerned that my answers to some of your questions may hurt you more than they help you, so I’d like you to take some time to think about them. After that, if you still want to know, I’ll tell you.” Seek the advice found in most good affair recovery books, or from a qualified counselor, to direct both of you in this process.

STEP **9** Start minimizing your regrets by determining who you will become.

You are telling a story right now. You are telling a story of an affair. You are telling a story of a marriage. You are telling a story of love. And maybe you’re quite confused with how it should be told.

Most people are only weighing their options by looking at two things: their obligations and their desires (what they believe they *should do* and what they really *want to have*). If either of these is your primary focus, you are failing to attend to the thing that is more likely to minimize future regret.

You should, instead, focus on answering this: *Who is the person I am becoming? What is the story I will be telling?* Define the character, heart and soul of the future you. What is he/she like? What will that future you say about the present you? Will it be a conversation of satisfaction or regret? It’s up to you.

One of the first things that came up in my counseling session was what kind of man did I want to be regardless of how everything progressed. I knew for me I wanted to be able to walk away from this whole experience and (1) be able to look myself in the mirror and be okay with my actions, (2) know I made a legitimate effort toward reconciliation, doing everything I could, and (3) improve other relationships in my life.

-an Unfaithful Spouse

STEP **10** Work to understand WHY you had an affair.

You could likely give me a short list of obvious reasons why you started this affair. Your list may be accurate, but it probably wouldn’t be complete. For anyone raised in a culture where adultery is considered wrong, the choice to have an affair is usually rooted in some kind of brokenness. That broken part of you is something you need to understand if you want to be able to trust yourself.

Getting to the “why” answers is not easy work. And it’s never a single answer. You’re searching for the pieces of a puzzle that, when put together, present a clear and accurate picture of the affair’s meaning. When you see it, you will be less likely to make that same choice again. Do the work necessary to answer that question.

STEP **11** Commit to the long process of earning forgiveness and trust.

Forgiveness and trust, while related to each other, are two different choices to be made by your spouse. They are not earned in the same way or received at the same time. Forgiveness may be offered after weeks or months; trust may follow after months or years.

What you do now will have a tremendous effect on your spouse’s ability to genuinely offer forgiveness and trust. The worst thing you can do right now is expect or insist on quick action. What should you do instead?

Forgiveness: Ask for it; don’t demand it. The genuine expression of “I’m sorry” should be offered often as you witness your spouse’s pain. Take responsibility, but be willing to wait for full forgiveness to come.

Trust: Your spouse may choose to start trusting you in small ways, but the genuine emotional trusting will only come when adequate amounts of two ingredients have been mixed together: (1) enough time, filled with (2) right stuff. The “right stuff” is consistent trustworthiness. You can have all the time in the world, but without trustworthy behavior, trust will never be restored. Conversely, even if you begin acting in a 100% trustworthy manner, it will take time before your spouse feels confident.

STEP Find the right support.

12

If there is ever a time when a couple needs a good counselor, it is after an affair. If you and your spouse are committed to rebuilding the marriage, I encourage you to start couple’s counseling as soon as possible.

Make sure you find a counselor who is experienced in the work of affair recovery. There are many good marriage counselors who are honestly uncomfortable focussing on the trauma work required for infidelity issues. These counselors will minimize the trauma and push you toward marriage building too soon. Don’t waste time or money with someone who does not fully understand this problem.

What if your spouse refuses to go to counseling? Then start on your own and ask your spouse to join you (probably with a different counselor) after you’ve done some work on your own.

STEP Move in a new direction.

13

Many valuable books and courses have been written to help couples learn the necessary skills of marriage building, but I believe there is a single principle that underlies them all. *In any encounter, healthy relationship is experienced when each partner moves toward the other with love and truth.*

When you feel disappointed, hurt, and defensive, you probably move in other directions. If you’re like most people, you either move away (physically leave or emotionally shut down) or against (anger, criticism, insistence, abuse, etc.). Relationships begin to change when each partner turns their focus away from the faults of their partner and give attention instead to the ways they fail to *move toward*. Tremendous trust is developed when each person begins to trust in the selfless, vulnerable moves of their partner. The change starts with you. You must (1) seek connection, (2) start with an expression of love/care, and *then* (3) openly and honestly express your thoughts and feelings.

In any encounter, healthy relationship is experienced when each partner moves toward the other with love and truth.

STEP Commit to conversations that connect.

14

Communication is a primary means by which partners “move toward” one another in a marriage or relationship. I suggest three actions that will help assure a satisfying conclusion to conversations, even when partners do not agree on the issue.

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